



Written by [John Stossel](#) on November 8, 2023

Canceling Cancel Culture

"I was not genuine in my own beliefs," says 23-year-old Rikki Schlott in my new video. "I self-censored."

Why? What did this college student believe that was so unacceptable that she felt she had to hide it?

The fact that she's a right-leaning libertarian.

"I was afraid to have Thomas Sowell and Jordan Peterson books on my bookshelf."

If her classmates at NYU saw that, she says, she might have been "verbally attacked on social media, maligned as whatever 'ist' or 'ism' people might attack me with."

So Schlott kept her mouth shut, eventually dropping out of NYU.

I ask her, "If you were doing it again, you'd speak out?"

"I *did* speak out! Here I am!" She responds.

By "here," she means my TV studio, where I interviewed her about a new book she co-wrote titled, "The Canceling of the American Mind." It details how cancel culture grew into a serious problem on campuses.

Examples:

A teacher in Virginia lost his job for calling a transgender student "she."

At Hamline University, an art history lecturer lost her job simply for showing a painting of Muhammad.

A University of Virginia med student was banished from campus for merely questioning the importance of "microaggressions."

Then such idiocy spread beyond campuses.

A Levi Strauss executive felt she had to resign because employees objected to her tweets criticizing Covid school closures and mask mandates for children.

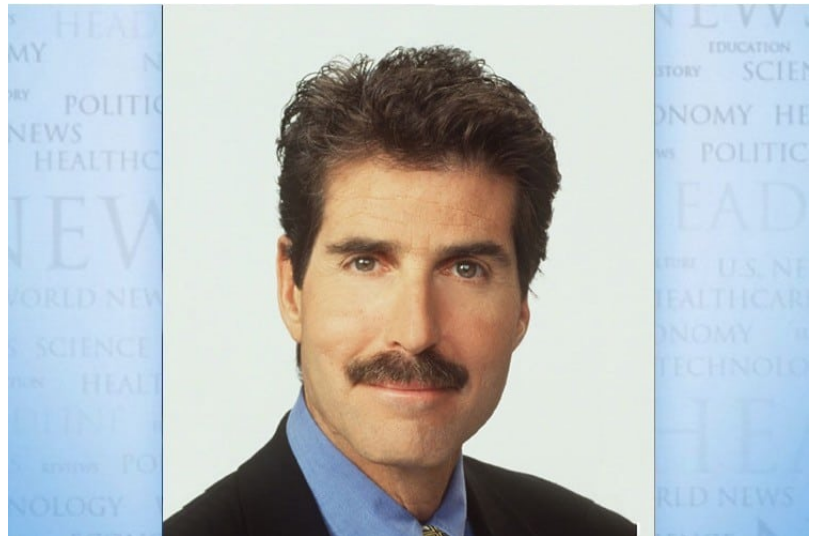
The Philadelphia Inquirer's top editor was forced to resign after approving an article titled "Buildings Matter Too," after Black Lives Matter rioters burned down buildings. Some at the paper called his headline "extremely inappropriate" and "tone-deaf."

And so on.

Now some want to punish people who defend Hamas. Others want to silence Israel's defenders.

Schlott argues that America needs more free speech, even if it's hateful. "Being a true free speech champion does require that you defend speech that even you disagree with."

Schlott's co-author on "The Canceling of the American Mind" works for FIRE, the Foundation for



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Individual Rights and Expression. FIRE argues that *everything* can be said, as long as it's not direct incitement of violence, willful negligence or defamation.

Schlott tells me, "You are well within your First Amendment rights to cancel people and to malign them on social media. But the question is, 'do we want to live in a culture where that is our first reaction?'"

She points out that her generation started tweeting when they were kids, and many posted stupid things.

"Young people need to be able to screw up."

Maybe. But based on what I see on my newsfeeds, it's people her age who are most eager to "cancel" people.

"It is true that younger Americans tend to be more pro-cancel culture," she replies. "Millennials have the most positive view, and as you get older, it goes lower and lower. But Gen Z (ages 11 to 26) completely switches that around. Only 8% have a positive view of it. That's because if you're a young person who grows up in a graceless society, you're always looking behind your back. You see friends torn down on social media. You're not going to want to live in a world like that."

I push back. "But they perpetuate a world like that!"

"It's a tyranny of the minority," she replies. "One squeaky wheel scares the life out of everyone else. Then we self-censor."

She did that in college.

Students like her kept their mouths shut because they didn't want to be reported as "biased." NYU officials, like the secret police in East Germany, even encouraged students to report on others.

She tells me, "When I got to NYU, the first thing I had to do was go pick up my ID card. I found on the back the emergency number, in case you're in danger, and a *bias response hotline* in case you're offended. The university itself sanctioned the idea that you can snitch on your peers."

She says it's time for students to push back against school censorship.

"We need to say we want to live in a free speech culture.... Courage is contagious. As soon as I spoke out at NYU, people came out of the woodwork to say, 'Thank you for saying that! I completely agree with you.'"

Every Tuesday at JohnStossel.com, Stossel posts a new video about the battle between government and freedom. He is the author of Give Me a Break: How I Exposed Hucksters, Cheats, and Scam Artists and Became the Scourge of the Liberal Media.

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